

Forthcoming attractions

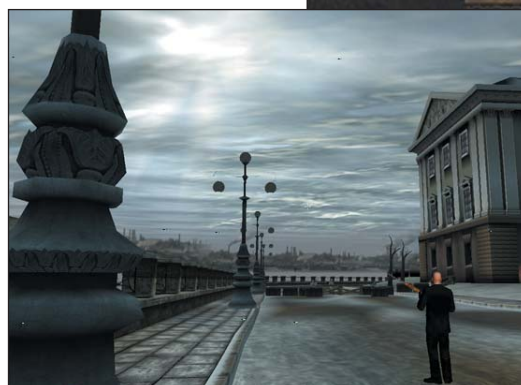
Eh, gringo, you and me, we can run this country – into the ground, probably. If you fancy some pseudo-Latin-American authoritarian rule then check out Take 2 Interactive's *Tropico* and its recently released brother expansion pack, *Tropico: Paradise Island*. We reviewed this sim-with-a-difference in anticipation and found it good, although it was lacking in realism (see the review on page 226). Pass me that electric cable, Juan.

We're continuing our coverage of all things Xbox this month by looking at a launch game for the MS console – *Mad Dash Racing* (page 232). With music from the likes of Fat Boy Slim, combined with cartoon graphics and gameplay only comprehensible to hyperactive 10-year-olds, *Mad Dash* might be entirely beyond you. However, for children, teenagers and optimistic 20-somethings, it's a cracker. Not nearly as good as the Xbox's demo of *Fusion Frenzy*, but fun nonetheless.

Out for PCs in March is the sequel to the cracking, if difficult, *Hitman*. Hopefully you'll have improved your skills, or bought

→ Liquid lunch: Blood Omen's Seraphan vampires are on fluids only

↓ The loneliness of the long-distance killer: no team players in *Hitman 2*



a pair of rubber-soled shoes – either way *Hitman 2: Silent Assassins* should prove easier to play as you can now indulge in first- or third-person views.

Available across all formats at the end of March is *Blood Omen 2*, a scary-sounding *Dungeons and Dragons*-style



affair in the same vein as *Soul Reaver*, Kain and the Vampires of Nosgoth. When we reviewed *Soul Reaver 2*, Spencer Dalziel liked it plenty, so it should be worth a look.

"After being defeated by the Seraphan Lord and losing the

Soul Reaver, Kain [awakens] 200 years later to find his world dominated by the Seraphan Order, vampire hunters he defeated long ago. Using stealth, smarts and reflexes Kain continues his struggle for the *Soul Reaver* and dominance over Nosgoth." What nonsense. Enjoy. ■

Brain Teasers volume one

Brain Teasers is one of a range of four CD-ROMs in *The Times* Testing Series published by Kogan Page Interactive. The series also contains psychometric, aptitude and IQ quizzes. Put together by top puzzle experts, *Brain Teasers* tests both your general knowledge and your puzzle-solving skills either against the clock in strict, exam-like conditions or at your leisure. It's devised both for those who like to solve puzzles as a hobby, and those who need to put their mental powers to more serious uses.

Job candidates regularly have to undergo selection tests when applying for new positions, and this CD-ROM aims to help applicants improve their test scores. *Brain Teasers* uses a style

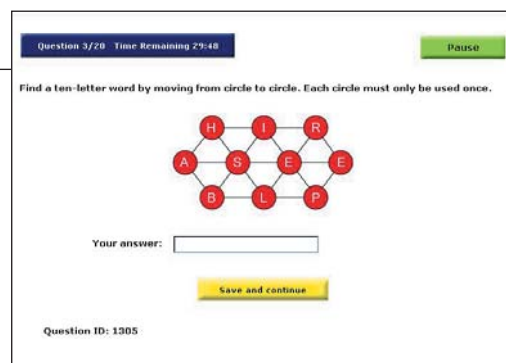
and format of questioning that will be familiar to you if you have ever taken a Mensa test, and some of the questions are tough enough to keep you up all night. The Masterclass section contains questions

that aren't so much brain teasers as head wreckers, but with a bit of effort you may surprise

yourself. There are hundreds of number- and word-based games in this CD-ROM, so you'll always find a challenge.

On the down side, some of the questions do appear more than once even when you've only taken a few tests, which is irritating. At £19.99, it's also a touch on the pricey side, but as some of the puzzles will keep you occupied for hours it is reasonable value for money. *Brain Teasers* will certainly help you develop your powers of lateral thinking: as you learn to recognise problems and explore different methods of solving them you will become a more astute puzzle solver. ■

Ben Camm-Jones



↑ Tenuous link: quiz performance can affect your employability

Brain Teasers volume one

System requirements: 133MHz Pentium; Windows 98/2000/NT/Me/XP; 32MB RAM; 35MB hard disk space.

Kogan Page Interactive: 01903 828 800

Website: www.kogan-page.co.uk

Price: £19.99

Overall rating **6**

Tropico

Ever fancied yourself as a brutal dictator? Here's your chance to see if you've got what it takes. Tropico sets you up as el Presidente on a small Caribbean island. Like the SimCity series, it allows you to decide on how land is used: whether for industry or tourism or all of the above.

Tropico permits more direct intervention with individual members of your population than a sim game. When the troublemakers get too irritating there's a selection of 'hired goon' options for punishment with a

→ Go bananas: your chance to oppress and exploit all you want in Tropico

personal touch, and others to deal with bribery. If all else fails, the Eliminate button calls in a hitman to provide a permanent end to the grumbling.

But even the law-abiding population of your island can be demanding. For some reason they have a strong aversion to living in shacks and, as time goes by, they will look to el Presidente to do more than live in the palace and divert cash to his Swiss bank account. They will call for such luxuries as education, health care and even free elections.

Ignore their demands for too long – especially the demands of your soldiers – and a little window will pop up to tell you a coup d'état is in progress. If there aren't

enough loyalists, your next view will be from the back of a row boat as Tropico recedes into the distance.

Entertaining as Tropico initially is, it couldn't hold my interest. I found myself turning the game speed up to very fast, rather than just waiting for my construction workers to get on with it. The 'happiness' and 'respect for leader' graphs regularly went for a dive, and that row boat showed up a little too often. ■

Ben Gallagher



Tropico

System requirements: 200MHz Pentium; Windows 95/98/2000/Me/NT 4.0; 32MB RAM; 820MB hard disk space.

Take 2 Interactive: 01753 496 600

Website: www.take2games.co.uk

Price: £27.99 from Amazon

Overall rating **6**

Monsters, Inc

Most people who buy Monsters, Inc will have been inspired to do so after watching – and enjoying – the hit animated film. However, unless you're under five, you may want to hang on to those pennies. The film is funny, creative and sweet, but the computer game scores poorly in comparison.

There are only two characters to play with – Mike and Sully – which immediately limits the game and makes things boring. Each level's scenery is different, with a choice of the marketplace or downtown streets. But the objectives remain pretty much the same: you jump on things, break

boxes and scare people and, sadly, that's about it. The control keys are quite complex and could cause a problem for little fingers, so you may have to invest in a gamepad – an added expense.

You must collect jam jars of gunge that, of course, make your scares more powerful. There's the occasional coin and packet of what looks like crisps to collect – for extra fun some are hidden in boxes. Once you've collected your full gunge quota you have to scare the Nerves, child-like wind up dolls, which eventually explode from fear if you're doing it right.

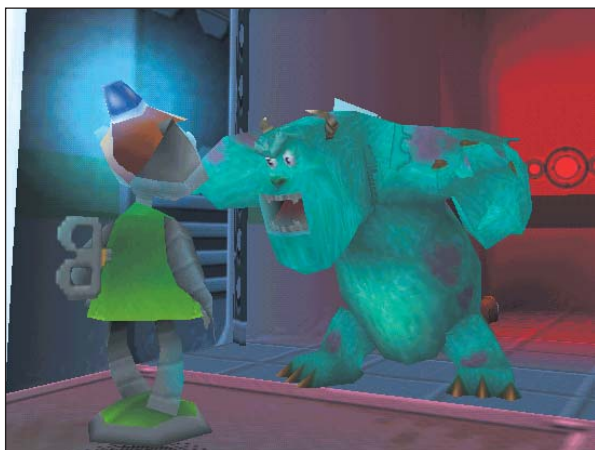
Admittedly, Monsters, Inc has been designed for kids, but it will really only amuse the youngest of children.

→ Where the child things are: Monsters, Inc will only entertain very young kids

The game doesn't convey any of the film's comedy, so it's a bit difficult to understand why you're bothering to go around scaring people.

The characters are cute, but Disney has let itself down here. If it had paid more attention to detail, added a few more characters and offered a greater variety of tasks to perform, this game could have been fantastic. ■

Wendy Brewer



Monsters, Inc

System requirements: 266MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/Me/XP; 32MB RAM; 250MB hard disk space.

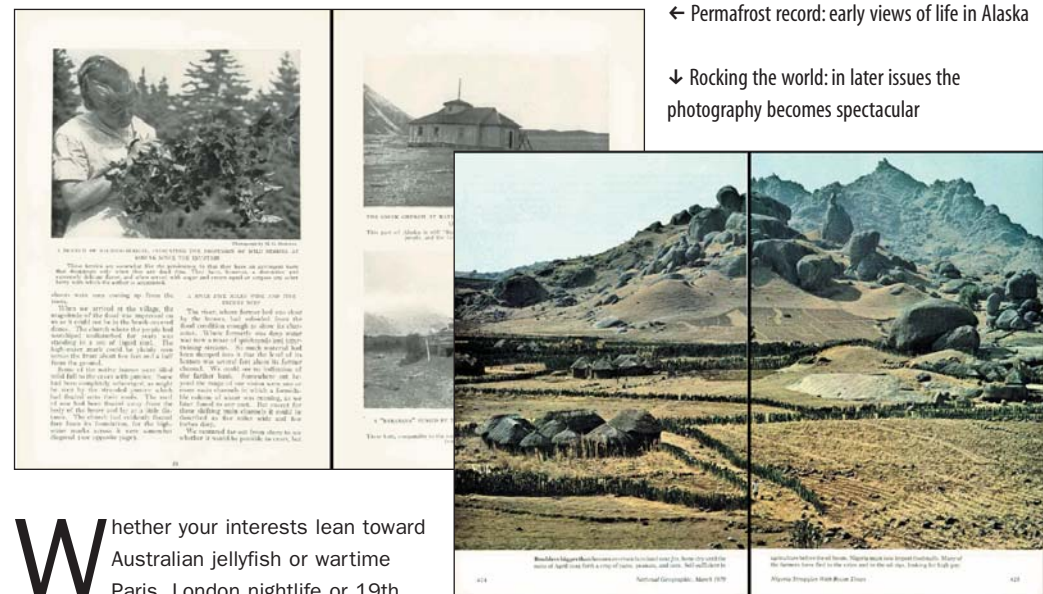
Disney Interactive: 020 8222 1413

Website: www.disney.co.uk/disneyinteractive/

Price: £19.99

Overall rating **5**

The Complete National Geographic – 112 Years Collectors Edition



← Permafrost record: early views of life in Alaska

↓ Rocking the world: in later issues the photography becomes spectacular

Whether your interests lean toward Australian jellyfish or wartime Paris, London nightlife or 19th century Indian holy men, you can read about it here. *The National Geographic*, at 113 years old, has produced a collector's edition of 31 CDs containing every issue of the magazine from 1888 until 2000.

Browse the fantastic reference material and watch as the style changes over the years – illustrations move from sketches to the first black and white photographs, then on to the beautiful colour photography of today. No matter which era or century you're interested in, the *The National Geographic* has never lost its sense of awe for the wonders of the world. It still makes fantastic reading, with the beauty and diversity of the countries illustrated in breathtaking detail.

History of geography

In our modern society, with the ease of access to various forms of media and plenty of people travelling further afield, we understand and have a greater knowledge of other civilisations' cultures. Revert back to 1888 when *The National Geographic* was first published, though, and you'll notice an inevitable change in reporting, with ignorance and naivety shining through. Issues from less politically correct times are not so careful of the feelings of people they are reporting on – either assuming they're unlikely to see the magazine, or maybe just not caring.

In 1913, the Rev WM Zumbro's article on Indian ascetics included a photo of a saddhu, a devotee of Sita. His appearance, covered in white ashes and wearing a "weird head-dress", said Zumbro, "render[s] him to western eyes more like a clown than a holy man".

And the world has changed since 1956 when John EH Nolan wrote an admiring tale called 'Silkworms in England Spin for the Queen' about Lady Hart Dyke and the silkworm farm she had set up in her home, Lullingstone Castle. Lady Hart Dyke had, 20 years previously, imported thousands of eggs and mulberry cuttings from China and had travelled to Italy to learn her craft. Pretty, smiling young women in 50s-style

dresses are seen feeding the fat worms, honoured to be producing the Queen's silk.

Paper view

Navigable screenshots of every page, every advert and illustration let you feel you're looking through the real thing – to the extent that the older magazines can be hard to read, even magnified. The setup procedure isn't as straightforward as it might be, with several levels of installation and decisions to be made at each stage – and for anyone used to the web it is frustrating to constantly be changing CDs to access another decade's issues.

But with its efficient search system and intuitive interface, the collector's edition is a great way to look through the history of *The National Geographic* and find the subject you want. However, in the end it just made me want to get my hands on the real thing and curl up with the paper magazine. ■

Gillian Law

↓ In the can: the magazine's photographers will stop at nothing to get the shot



Destroyer Command

Life on a World War II ‘tin can’ destroyer was no walk in the park. They often bore the brunt of heavy casualties and initiating torpedo assaults with strategic precision is no easy feat. Fortunately, the newly released Destroyer Command trains you up in the art of naval combat before putting you out on the ocean.

You start off in command of a single destroyer involved in missions on the Atlantic, Mediterranean and the US East coast in 1941-45. You can opt to complete historically accurate missions or enter

instant play, which offers such delights as hunting U-boats, escorting convoys, supporting marine landings and even coping with attack by kamikaze pilots.

However, the high level of realism will probably lead trainspotters to focus on re-enacting historical battles. If successful, you’ll receive promotions and work your way up to command a squadron of tin cans, but this is no easy ride.

Fortunately, the detailed subsystem controls can be pushed to automatic if manual operation gets too much (and, believe me, it does). Destroyer Command doesn’t, ahem, push the boat out graphically but the weather systems – especially the pitch and yaw effects of the sea on a small destroyer – are well realised.



↑ Sight unsound: while its play is realistic, Destroyer Command’s graphics are weak

So far, so niche. But Destroyer Command does have a pretty impressive trick up its sleeve. An owner of submarine simulator Silent Hunter II can play against someone with Destroyer Command online. This is some innovation, and could well lead to other games developers following the initiative. But it’s not enough to raise this game above the mediocre. ■

Spencer Dalziel

Destroyer Command

System requirements: 266MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/Me/XP; 64MB RAM; 650MB hard disk space.

Ubi Soft: 01932 838 230

Website: www.ubisoft.co.uk

Price: £29.99

012345678910

Overall rating6

Worms Blast

The concept behind Worms Blast is an exceedingly simple one, owing more than a little to retro arcade games such as Space Invaders. The object of the game is to row your dinghy around a stretch of water, shooting rows of coloured blocks that descend slowly from the sky to crush you.

To destroy a block, the colour of your ammo must match that of the block. However, the colour of your missiles changes at random each time you fire one. If you’re caught between falling blocks and the surface of the water too many times, it’s game over. You must also avoid falling

victim to the array of fridges, anvils and other heavy objects that fall from the sky at regular intervals.

There are four different game modes: Puzzle, Tournament, You vs the Computer and Multiplayer. However, despite every effort to spice up the simple premise, I got the strong feeling Worms Blast might not be complex enough to hook experienced gamers.

Previous outings in the franchise generated amusement by contrasting the cute worms with the ultra-violence they dealt out, but Worms Blast comes across as a bit too cutesy. And there’s not much weaponry on offer – all you get is one mangy bazooka.

Worms Blast does feature some terrific

→ Damp squib: without the ultra-violence, Worms Blast lacks a certain something



Paul Rincon

Worms Blast

System requirements: 266MHz Pentium II/AMD K6-III 300; Windows 95/98/Me; 64MB RAM; 750MB hard disk space.

Ubi Soft: 01932 838 230

Website: www.ubisoft.co.uk

Price: £19.99

012345678910

Overall rating5

Mad Dash Racing

Listen to this: “In an attempt to confirm his superiority as the best racer, crazed wizard Hex has whisked the world’s champions off to his island. You must compete in a race for survival against the evil Hex, his dirty minions and your unforgiving friends. Glide across rivers of hot, steaming lava, bash through mammoth boulders, and slide down icy glaciers to beat the other racers and escape Hex’s wicked wrath.”

PC Advisor got ahead in the Xbox race by scooping a US machine. At first we were in trouble because these use the NTSC TV standard, but ThreeDoubleYou (www.threedoubleyou.com) helped us out

with an NTSC/PAL converter, which also works on DVDs. So we got going on Mad Dash Racing, which accompanies the console and, as the blurb left demonstrates, promises some thrills.

And it delivers: this is nothing if not frenetic and challenging. But you’re going to lose unless you can teach your fingers new tricks, as there’s a steep learning curve.

Because this is Xbox, the graphics and sound are awesome, but you’ll need a big TV or monitor to appreciate two-player involvement. Mad Dash is, in essence, a racing game in the vein of Sonic the Hedgehog, where you guide characters through make-believe worlds collecting power-ups, weapons and so on. A nice touch is that there are different routes



↑ Run ogre, run: you have to go like the clappers in Mad Dash Racing

through each race which match the different qualities of the characters.

Mad Dash Racing is about as silly as a game can get. Nonetheless, it’s a cracker and will keep children and adults occupied for hours on end. However, if you play anyone younger than you you’ll just have to rely on the fact that you own a car to feel superior. ■

Rupert Collins-White

The Ultimate Ride

I’ve many fond childhood memories of amusement parks – the long queues for rides, the rigidly applied height restrictions, the tacky prizes that fall apart before you’ve got them home and the candy-floss vomit of over-indulgent juveniles.

The Ultimate Ride might not give you all this fairground excitement, but it allows you to relive the thrill of the big dipper from the comfort of your own home.

You’d think that this gut-wrenching sensation would be difficult to replicate on a PC – and you’d be right. The game looks very impressive, but when you’re riding these rollercoasters you can’t feel the

G-force, although if you stare hard enough at the screen for a long time you can recreate the dizziness and nausea.

There’s not a great deal to The Ultimate Ride – simply design and ride your own rollercoaster, then upload the track to the website for others to try out. Alternatively, download other rollercoasters from the website and take them for a spin. There are various themes, environments and three different types of track – metal, wooden and hanging – to work with. You can also add corkscrews, loops and sheer drops to your track until your heart is content.

Although you can really exercise your imagination by creating tracks that no human being would be able to ride without suffering

→ Downward spiral: create dangerous rides and share them with the world



Ben Camm-Jones

The Ultimate Ride

System requirements: 333MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/Me/XP; 32MB RAM; 120MB hard disk space.

Disney Interactive: 020 8222 1413

Website: www.disney.co.uk/ultimate_ride

Price: £19.99

012345678910

Overall rating4